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HISTORICAL MUSEUMS

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HISTORICAL MUSEUMS

IN A DOZEN COUNTRIES

AN ADDRESS

READ BEFORE THE BOSTONIAN SOCIETY AT ITS ANNUAL
MEETING, JANUARY 12, 1909

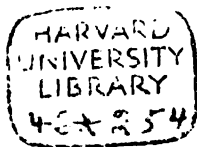
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HISTORICAL MUSEUMS

THE Bostonian Society, among its purposes and operations, forms and maintains a collection of objects illustrating our civil and domestic history. Historical Museums, as such collections are called, are rather modern in date, although composed of old materials. They exist now in every enlightened country, and, for information or guidance, we may well find what they are. Numerous minor collections cannot be mentioned in an Address of moderate length; the important and greater furnish more than ample subject-matter, and descriptions of them must be condensed, as there are over forty that I have seen, and about which I have made notes and wish to speak. They do not, of course, include what are called Scientific collections, or exhibits of curiosities, or Galleries of Art, of which there is a very large number; some of them do, however, contain, and very properly, remarkable works of Art. They may be considered partly in a geographical order, and to some extent in classes.

Beginning abroad at the North, in the New Town of *Edinburgh*, we find in a large and handsome recent Gothic building of red sandstone, the *Museum of Scottish Antiquities*, — good and valuable. Here are stone and flint implements of pre-

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lead color. Numerous Roman objects, generally small, are shown — bronze, glass, pottery, Samian ware, and sculpture — indicating that Lutetia did not surpass Roman London. These and early French were the chief classes, until the period of the Revolution; that was extensively illustrated by arms, swords, red caps, medals, money, and irons from the Bastille. There were also many maps and views of the city.

The *Cluny* has one important part, such as does not, I think, exist in any other Historical Museum, — the large and high remains of a Roman Bath, showing walls and vaults of massive brick-work that would quite dwarf our Old State House. Its mediaeval rooms are also unusual, and are charmingly picturesque. Large, plain, modern rooms, that have been added in order to hold the increasing collections, may be necessary, but they are ugly. The general effect of the Hotel is, however, old and historic, and it is thus preserved, and thus also are the vast collections of Art and historic objects there gathered.

In our rapid course through Europe we will leave for final observation the greatest of the Historical Museums — the Germanic — and again go northward.

Denmark has in *Copenhagen* a charming and precious monument in *Rosenborg Castle*, built between 1610 and 1625, of dull red bricks and grey stone, in what we call Jacobean style. Both the edifice, an oblong three-storied one, and its contents, form a Historical Museum largely of Royal life. Old and

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rich furniture, silver and ivory work, jewelry, dresses of kings, and other objects, form an extensive and sumptuous collection. No recent theorist has been let loose here to exploit his notions about architecture.

An hour's ride distant is *Friedericsborg*, an immense and superb edifice, also in Jacobean style, built of like materials on three sides of a spacious court, and surrounded by a large moat and lake. There are sixty-two apartments or galleries, nearly all elaborately finished, including the ceilings, the variety of which is especially remarkable. In these apartments is an immense number of paintings, chiefly portraits of various qualities, and also a profusion of rich old furniture, especially carved cabinets. It seems strange that we must go to rural Denmark to find perhaps the largest and most magnificent example of the Jacobean style that we are apt to think is peculiarly English, and at the same time realize that at its date Denmark was in strength a rival of England.

At Stockholm is the *National Museum of Sweden*, a large and handsome modern building facing a wide canal, an exceptionally fine frontage, and of the sort that makes the city sometimes called the Venice of the North. Here is a large collection of Swedish and Scandinavian antiquities, besides a great deal of rich old furniture, china, and ceramics. It is a very creditable Museum. In Drottning-garten, a distant part of the city, is the Scandinavian Museum, a very large one crowded into many small rooms in two buildings. Almost everything used in civil, domestic or warlike life, during the

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good old times, is shown, including arms, manacles, catchpoles and thumbscrews. There also figures of peasants at home in costume. The attendants are women in picturesque old Scandinavian dresses.

In Moscow is the *National Museum of Russia*, a curious and very large recent building of red bricks, in old Russian style, facing the vast oblong Red Place beside the Kremlin. Here, in large and simple halls, are great collections showing the life and development of Russians from prehistoric to early civilized ages — the stone age, the bronze, that of pottery, and onward. Numerous frescoes further illustrate the subjects. No dwelling or furniture of recent ages is shown, the illustration ending about where, for instance, that at Nuremburg begins. The later ages and the splendors of Russia are shown within the walls of the Kremlin, in the Imperial Treasury, and that of the Metropolitan of Moscow. It should be observed that all of these Historical Museums are on some of the most historic ground, and among perhaps the most historic buildings in the empire.

In the *Treasury* is such an array as could only be presented by an immense empire that combines Asia and Europe. It is in a ground-floor suite and high vaulted halls overhead. Arms and armor, while abundant, are surpassed elsewhere, but gold and silver plate, old regalia and jewelry are prodigious in quantity and sumptuousness. The coronation robes and thrones for a century past form a superb and unique collection. Gifts or tribute from Oriental rulers are also

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extraordinary. On the lower floor are many large, elaborate and curious old State carriages, much gilded but faded.

Near the centre of the Kremlin in an old, plain, not secure-looking edifice, but carefully guarded, are two or three rooms where the wonders of the treasury of the *Metropolitan* are shown. Here in glazed cases is an amazing array of ancient ecclesiastical objects — numberless ikons, robes, crosiers, relics, jewels by thousands, and over a dozen large books bound in solid silver — gilt, embossed and enameled. One thick royal folio is covered by a blaze of jewels arranged in elaborate designs. All these objects were near one of the recent revolutionary murders of a high personage, and one draws a long breath at the thought of what would have occurred if the murderers controlled.

Objects illustrative of Russian history are also shown in the Palaces. Accounts of them would first and foremost describe that narrow and very long gallery in the *Hermitage* with relics of Peter the Great, founder of the modern empire ; there are his camp outfit, the lathes he delighted to use, the articles turned by him, and small precious objects of almost every conceivable sort. Left by later sovereigns are plate, watches, rings, snuff-boxes, perfume bottles, jewelry, and works like those in the Green Vaults in Dresden — cups and vases of jade, jasper, rhodonite, in nearly endless profusion, besides many a grand old carved cabinet.

At still greater distance from us, and larger and more important, are two Museums so vast, and we might say each so unique of its sort, and so far beyond anything there could be

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in the Western world, that I will only mention them : one is the Museo Nazionale in *Naples* with almost countless objects from Pompeii and Herculaneum, illustrating the civil and domestic life of the Romans nineteen centuries ago ; the other is the Museum in *Cairo*, showing the history of Egypt through many remote ages. Only a volume about each could describe it. In regard to the installation of each, it should be remarked that the collection at Naples is in an imposing and spacious edifice, substantial, and apparently secure. At Cairo, the Museum was in a damp place, from which it was removed out of town to the Gizeh Palace, a huge, shoddy, but costly edifice, where risk of fire seemed appalling. Thence it was moved to the extensive and secure new Museum in the city.

Here also may be mentioned a very interesting and important class of collections that can never to any great extent be in the New World, — *Arms and Armor*. Many minor collections exist, but there are five that are great, and of especial importance — the one in the Tower of London, the oldest and most historic place where any of them are ; that of the Museum of Artillery in Paris ; that in the Palace in Madrid ; that in the Heeresmuseum in Vienna ; and, most sumptuously installed of all, that in the Royal Palace in Turin. Only nations with long histories can make and show such collections.

We now resume attention to Historical Museums of a sort that can in some degree give us suggestions.

Switzerland has notably formed such collections, varying from moderate to great excellence. Small in area, but large

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in enterprise, and long in history, the ancient Republic has, on the whole, shown its varied and attractive record as have few countries. Of Swiss Museums there are five that I will mention.

In *Lausanne*, on the hill not far from the Cathedral, is the Cantonal Museum, in old rooms in an old building, all quaint, but of no great architectural impressiveness. Natural History is largely shown. There are numerous Roman relics, mostly of the smaller sort, and many more of the Napoleonic age. Of mediaeval times there is a moderate show. It is, however, to be remembered that this exhibit is of Vaud, and not of the nation, as at Zurich.

At *Lucerne*, in the old Rathaus by the river, is a so-called Historic and Art Museum, with old arms, dress, odds and ends, and poor pictures that do not long detain us.

In *Bale* there is something much better. The Barfüsser-Kirche, that dates from early in the fourteenth century, has been made a Historical Museum. It is a high and very long edifice, the choir especially, in the Pointed style, with very tall choir windows, as the Germans liked to make them. It is, indeed, an old building in historic style preserved, and contains, some think, the second best collection in Switzerland. Civil, military, ecclesiastic, domestic life are illustrated in a way never possible with our limited resources. In addition to the multitude of smaller objects, there are, along the floor of the

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nave aisles, several rooms of the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries.

At *Bern*, the capital of the country, is the *Bernese Historical Museum* in a large, recent building, on rising ground fronting the city and the lofty Kirchenfeld Bridge — an imposing site. Both the building and its contents would be impressive if we did not know how they are surpassed at Zurich. There are a few Roman relics, some of them brought by Bernese soldiers from Italy, and several rooms in domestic styles of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Cantonal relics are numerous, among them many views of Bern.

Zurich shows the triumph of Swiss collecting, in what may well be called the chief Historical Museum of the country, and the second of modern ages in Europe, or, indeed, the world. It is such an historic exhibit as could only be made by a country with the age, the arts and the people of Switzerland. The site of the building is not of the best ; it is near the extensive railway station, but the building, opened in 1898, is remarkable. It shows the picturesqueness of the various national styles ; it is thoroughly Swiss, and of stone it is also safe and substantial. There are some sixty apartments, large and small, plain or elaborate. Some of them are simple, modern halls for exhibits, but most of them are examples of the many styles used in the country through a dozen generations. Numerous old rooms have been brought here, and are preserved as they were made, undamaged by notions of recent

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architects. Rooms entirely new, but in old styles, are made representative of them, as well as is possible.

I cannot transcribe here all my notes from my journal, but must give a condensed account. Over sixteen hundred years of national history are illustrated to a surprising extent. You first see objects of the Stone Age, then of the Bronze, then a model of a Lake dwelling, — that curious style of early house standing on piles in the water. Farther on are pre-Roman and Roman bronzes, mostly small; simple pottery, including Samian, and glassware, showing the Roman occupation. In Salle III, continuing the history, are swords and objects from German graves. In IV are early Christian pictures reminding us how early was the Faith active in the country. Tiles and other objects, to the fifteenth century, lead the subject to the central Middle Ages, and, emblematic of them, a low, vaulted, apsidal chapel.

Ancient apartments, real ones brought here, not modern antiques made by recent imaginative so-called architects, begin at Salle XIV, the Council Room of Mellingen (North Switzerland) 1467, with a large square and flat wooden ceiling, carved but not painted, and walls covered with tall panels, also wooden. From this room we go through the series of genuine old rooms brought here, and making perhaps the most notable feature of the Museum, — one utterly beyond our means. They are beside, or connected by, various corridors or other divisions. From the Abbey of Fraumünster, in Zurich, 1489, is a small, low and square room similar in style to XIV. XVII is a larger but low room, also from Zurich, 1507,

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one of its sides a window of six bays. XVIII is a larger but similar low room from the same Abbey in Zurich, also dating from 1507; it is a corner room with five windows, that gives a pleasant example of the comfort and picturesqueness of monastic life at that time. XXII is a curious old apothecary shop. XXV is a chamber, large, square, and moderately high, finished throughout in wood, from a convent in Zurich, 1521. XXVI is a Renaissance chamber of 1585, from Chiavenna,—a large one, and the richest yet shown; it is very rich with carvings, inlay, and gilding. XXVII is a corner room with three windows, smaller and lower than the last, all of wood without gilding, but rich, from the Rosenberg, in Stans (Lake of Lucerne), 1566. XXVIII is a bedchamber, of 1582, from a small chateau, Wiggen, on the Lake of Constance. XXIX is a medium-sized Renaissance State room, all of wood, with very elaborate panelling on the walls and ceiling, from the Siedenhof, Zurich, 1620. There never was anything even remotely approaching it in old Massachusetts. The same remark applies to XLIII, a very large hall from the Lochmann house in Zurich, dating from the end of the seventeenth century. It is in what is called baroque style. Paintings in large panels cover the ceiling, and there is a broad frieze with portraits of public men of rank. XLV is a rococo chamber of the eighteenth century, with a great exhibit of old Swiss porcelain. On the upper floor is a wood-finished chamber from Biasco (Ticino), 1589, that, although of moderate size and elaboration, and one of the simpler of the old rooms here, is delightful.

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It is impossible to describe in this paper even the classes of objects shown, illustrating the domestic life of the country for the past three centuries. The wonder is how and where they were obtained, and that so small a country could have produced them.

The longest and highest hall, lofty, vaulted and round-arched — the Salle des Armes — contains an immense display of armor, largely of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, proving what a fighting people were the Swiss. In rather small rooms on the upper floor is a great deal of good furniture, and town and country dresses, further proving what a peaceful and domestic people they also were. In a Court are old, heavy cannon, and by the entrance a Diligence of the largest size, in perfect order, made for one of the main routes, an interesting memorial of travel over forty years ago, and ending the historic illustrations from the times of the Romans to our own. The Swiss have made a wonderful exhibit in their truly wonderful National Museum.

Zurich is Germanic in race and tongue, and we look farther at achievements by the race in Imperial Germany, first turning to the Imperial City also Germanic, though of the great dual monarchy.

Vienna shows, we may fairly think, the greatest civic Historical Museum in the world, and worthy of one of the world's stateliest cities. In the Rathaus, on the Ring, a very large and noble recent stone edifice in Gothic style, is the *Town Historical Museum*, occupying many apartments. Its vast collections

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are of objects from very early to modern times. In great numbers are maps, plans, models, and views of Vienna. Its money and medals are in profusion, as are plates illustrating the people, and their manners and customs. One large and lofty hall is filled with arms from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. There are, by my count, arms, axes, and lances enough of one of the earlier periods to at once equip one hundred and fifty men. This department alone would make a notable Museum. The collection in aggregate might be described as a Bostonian immensely magnified, far beyond possibility here.

In Austria also is the *Tyrolese Museum*, occupying a large recent building in *Innsbruck*, and illustrating times Roman to modern. We might wish we could show as much about Otis, Hancock, or Adams, as is here shown about Hofer the Tyrolese patriot.

In the German Empire are not a few historical collections of which I will mention half a dozen, leading on at last to the greatest of all, not only in Germany, but, of its sort in the world.

In *Berlin* is the very large, varied, and interesting *Hohenzollern Museum*, of personal objects associated with the past sovereigns. I know of no other like it, and comparable with it, unless that of the Romanoffs already mentioned.

At *Hannover* is the Welf Museum, largely of mediaeval objects, and others about which space does not allow me to say what I wish to say, and might say.

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In *Augsburg* is the *Maximilian's Museum* with Roman to recent work, and much that is local, to which the same remark must apply.

In *Nuremberg* there are two important and very interesting collections, both of them in well-preserved old structures, very old-world-like in fact and in effect. The *Burg*, with towers and a court yard on a rocky height, has some "restored" rooms, — and also some antique that are dingy enough, — containing many illustrations of former manners and customs, among them an extraordinary array of instruments of torture.

The *Germanic Museum* is in two extensive and complicated suppressed monasteries with four cloisters and dozens of quaint rooms containing a wonderfully large, varied, and interesting collection. Of the Stone Age it shows a good deal; of the Roman, minor and fewer objects, but of the Middle Ages there is much glass and other work, and of more recent times still greater abundance. There are numberless articles used in former domestic life. Monastic buildings and contents are an old world revelation. Few similar Museums have impressed me as much as did this one on my first visit.

The greatest National Historic Museum of the world, it seems to me, is the last foreign one that I will mention — the *Royal Bavarian Museum* in *Munich*. It occupies a very extensive edifice, opened in 1900, largely German Renaissance in style. At the entrance is a statue of the founder and de-

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signer of the now immense collections — King Maximilian II, with his motto, "An honor and example to my people." There are nearly one hundred halls or rooms, that, with their contents, fully illustrate the country's history, showing its great length and variety, from the rudest to the most civilized ages, and all ranks, royal, noble, burgher, peasant; life in palace, cloister, and field, in war and in peace, with all the forms of art that it produced.

We begin examination in Halls 1 to 3, with prehistoric, Roman, and early mediaeval objects; then in 4 and 5 continue with early church-work — crosiers, vestments, ivories, and rude sculptures. In 6 to 8 are early paintings. The finish of the halls and their contents grow more elaborate, until at 15 we reach the largest hall yet, — a chapel of six bays in Pointed style, with church fittings dating from 1400 to 1500, that alone form an extensive and valuable museum. Mediaeval subjects are continued to Hall 20 — large, square, and vaulted — the hall of a great Middle Age castle, containing armor, shields, axes and flags. Still larger is 22, showing the change to the Renaissance. The lofty, flat wooden ceiling, pale brown and natural color, with panels and scrolls, is from Schloss Dachau, 1564-67; the walls are tapestried, and the pillared door-cases reach to the ceiling. Here are shown original works by Peter Vischer (1455-1529) and his sons, and also rich furniture; 23 is a sumptuously finished hall from near Mantua; 24, with a flat wooden ceiling, panelled, is from the Fuggerschloss, in Donauwirth, dating from the sixteenth century. In 25 is another and a similar ceiling from the same castle, dated 1546;

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26 is a very small but elaborately finished room from Nuremberg, and again more in 28; 29 is the most sumptuous yet, from a part of the old palace in Munich no longer standing. There are five panels in the ceiling containing paintings, and twelve smaller in a deep frieze, with scrolls and figures all gilded. Superb inlaid cabinets and tapestry furnish this great apartment.

The rooms become modern until, in 34, a rather meagre eighteenth century style is reached; but in 37 the palatial style again appears in a large apartment with elaborate scroll work, gold on a salmon ground, and with mirrors and paintings, — perhaps the most gorgeous of all the rooms. 40 is a low room from Landshut. 41 — high, large, and with much gilded decoration — contains ivory carving amazing in workmanship and quantity. In 47 we reach the modern classic of Bavaria, and portraits and personal souvenirs of Ludwig I and Maximilian II.

This completes the circuit of the main floor. The rooms up stairs, although generally less notable, are well worth seeing, and there are more than forty. Smaller objects, still in great profusion and variety, are shown. Here I cannot transcribe all my notes about them. In the basement are several rooms illustrating the lives and homes of the country people. One large room contains an extraordinary collection of instruments of torture. Such objects, I may add, are scattered here and there in Museums, but there are five important collections of them, distinctly historical, about which I might sometime give an account; they are very suggestive.

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In leaving this wonderful exhibit of Art and History, we may well repeat the words we read on entering, the King's motto — "An honor and example to my people."

Already I have written and said enough to show the character and inestimable value of the Historical Museums in other lands. Let me add, though it must be briefly, something about a few in our own region, and then offer certain conclusions.

Our oldest Historical Society, the Massachusetts, through more than a century has been gathering objects illustrating the history of the State, or with interesting personal associations, to a notable extent portraits, of which it has a collection that could not be duplicated. All these mentioned form what is styled the Cabinet, that can be seen by the public every week except in summer.

The Essex Institute, in Salem, and the Pilgrim Society, in Plymouth, have important collections relating to the times and subjects within their spheres. Concord has a local exhibit worth making, seeing, and keeping, of which almost everything belonged to Concord people, and illustrates their history for generations. Lexington has an exhibit similar, though perhaps more general. Each of these Museums is in a good old pre-revolutionary house with a history, and kept practically unaltered.

Lastly we come to the Bostonian, installed in one of the most historic buildings in our country, and to a notable extent illustrating the by-gone life of the old town from which the Society is named, and whose record we try to preserve. What we should do and be in the future is for us to consider.

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After our review of the Historical Museums of the world — forty-one of which, in a dozen countries, have been named, and described so far as space here allows — we reach the certain conclusions.

We repeat, these Museums form a class by themselves ; they are not, as a rule, Galleries of Art or Scientific collections ; they are not miscellaneous gatherings from various regions, or of products of times and arts that do not belong to what we may call their sphere, — for each one has a sphere to which it is limited. Some of them are national, as at Cairo, Zurich, or Munich ; some are cantonal, others local, and relate to a town or city. Each shows all it can relating to its sphere. Some of them occupy an old building that is carefully preserved. Others, where no such building is available, or where collections are too large, have recent edifices. When a Museum is in an old historic building it should, and most appropriately, stay there, and preserve itself and the building. Where its sphere is local, it had best remain local, and not be merged with other collections — not be a mere part of something general. For instance the Concord Museum is composed of articles that belonged to Concord people ; it helps to tell their story, in an old Concord house, and it is a good and proper attraction to its home place — hundreds come to see it.

So with our Bostonian, on a larger scale. We are gathering much of value illustrating our old Town and its people, and we are keeping what we have in the most appropriate place. We have many portraits and views, but ours is a Historical Museum, not an Art Gallery. To almost any limit Art Gal-

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leries can be made in our part of the world, and with great success, as we see at Fenway Court, at the Boston Museum of Art, and that in New York. Many and distant ages and places with their works can be, and are shown. But a Historical Museum, as ours is, has, like each of its class, its limitations.

We did not make our history through past generations; we must take it and treat it as we find it with its scope. It is useless to say that our means are equal to those in regions abroad; we have not, let it be repeated, the long array of times and arts as at Zurich and Munich. But he is a poor Bostonian who does not appreciate what we do have. It is what there is illustrating the earlier life of a very great and growing nation — our nation: plain folks to a large extent very likely in the past, and largely plain things left by them, but they are folks and things of our own old home.

I delight in seeing old world treasures — they are a part of the great record of humanity, and as a part of that, besides being our home belongings, are our things of this old Town. Let us try to preserve what we have, and that is one of the secrets — or rather, plain truths — of success, and what is called fortune. Let us get and hold what we can, and we are far from the end of such getting, and hold here in its home place, the Old State House, home of the Bostonians.

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